



Immigrants & Minorities

Historical Studies in Ethnicity, Migration and Diaspora

ISSN: (Print) (Online) Journal homepage: www.tandfonline.com/journals/fimm20

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To cite this article: Marina Pérez de Arcos & Mahon Murphy (18 Sep 2024): Transimperial Internment: Wartime Mobility between German Cameroon and Neutral Spain, 1915–1920, *Immigrants & Minorities*, DOI: [10.1080/02619288.2024.2400535](https://doi.org/10.1080/02619288.2024.2400535)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/02619288.2024.2400535>



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Published online: 18 Sep 2024.



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Transimperial Internment: Wartime Mobility between German Cameroon and Neutral Spain, 1915–1920

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ABSTRACT


During the First World War, Spain engaged in humanitarian activities, including caring for internees, to substantiate its neutrality. On the African front, Spain's small Central African territory became a refuge for German troops as the French and British seized control of Cameroon. By bringing together voices from Germany, Britain, and Spain, as well as some Cameroonian perspectives, the article offers a fresh narrative about the transcontinental and transimperial experience of internment. The retreating German army collectively became the first European 'refugees' in Africa. This article surveys the multiple stages of their internment journey: the retreat from Cameroon into Spanish Guinea, internment on the island of Fernando Po and then in mainland Spain, and their eventual return to Germany or Cameroon, with some choosing to stay in Spain. Their experiences were transimperial not simply because they crossed imperial borders, but also because the infrastructure and conditions of internment conformed to a shared imperial 'archive' for the treatment of Europeans in captivity on African soil. The article also examines the lingering echoes of internment in the post-war period. By contributing to an overlooked case, this study aligns with broader efforts to globalise scholarship on the First World War, showcasing internment as a key example of the war's global effects.

ARTICLE HISTORY Received 15 February 2024; Accepted 29 August 2024

KEYWORDS First World War; global history; neutrality; Cameroon; Germany; Spain

Introduction

The Germans from the Cameroons are not behaving as correctly as they should. I have found out that at Saragossa one was killed by a señorita, whom he had

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grossly insulted. The señorita answered the Hun in a dignified manner, but the German replied by trying to kiss her. The lady then hit him over the head with a seltzer water-bottle, and killed him.¹

This dramatic incident was reported in *The Daily Telegraph* on 23 June 1916 by the newspaper's Madrid correspondent in an article titled 'The Huns in Spain'. To bolster the account's credibility and emphasise its message, the reporter also included a quote from a telegram published in what he described as a 'reliable Madrid paper', *El Mundo*. The telegram allegedly read: 'Public opinion is disgusted by the conduct of the interned Germans, who have already provoked several incidents and scandals here'. However, the governor of Zaragoza (Saragossa) provided a rather different version of the water-bottle affair, stating: 'The Germans from Cameroon interned in our city have behaved and continue to behave correctly in their social interactions. Although there were rumours that one of them had been killed by a lady, this was not confirmed upon conducting the necessary investigations'.²

How did Germans from Central Africa come to be interned in Spain? In the early months of 1916, German troops stationed in Cameroon, virtually surrounded by Allied forces on land and cut off from supplies by Allied control of the seas, crossed the Campo River into neutral Spanish Guinea (now Equatorial Guinea), a region known as Río Muni. This strategic move allowed them to seek refuge and evade the pursuing Allied forces, primarily British troops from neighbouring British Nigeria in the west and French forces from French Equatorial Africa (modern-day Chad, Central African Republic and Congo) in the south and east. The retreating German army included approximately 200 German officers, 6,000 Schutztruppen made up of both European (German) and non-European troops recruited locally, around 6,000 Cameroonian women, and roughly 4,000 servants and carriers. How did they become what Cameroonian historian Victor Ngoh termed the first European 'refugees' in Africa?³ Just three months later, these 'Huns' found themselves 3,300 kilometres away in neutral Spain.

The current article delves into the experiences of those who sought sanctuary in Spanish Guinea while escaping the British and French advance into Cameroon. It traces their journey from mainland Africa to the Iberian Peninsula between 1916 and 1920. As the episode reported in *The Daily Telegraph* illustrates, it is vital to consult Spanish sources that have often been disregarded in the limited international literature on this subject. Uniquely, the article weaves these Spanish materials into

a dialogue with British, German, French, and Cameroonian sources, shedding light on the global nature of internment during the Great War.

Significantly, the article contributes to the shift towards global history in the context of the First World War. Specifically, it connects to recent essential works that demonstrate the worldwide reach of internment and particular case studies of internment in the British imperial domain, such as the camps in Knockaloe (Britain), Fort Napier (South Africa), and Ahmednagar (India).⁴ Our aim is to illustrate the dynamic, globally mobile aspect of internment, coupled with an examination of internment in a neutral state.

While the focus of most existing studies has been on the belligerent powers, internment was also an important tool for neutral states. Indeed, internment of citizens from warring countries demonstrated one's neutrality, offered potential economic benefits in the form of captive labour and land cultivation, and created a channel for neutral states to influence the policies of belligerents.⁵ By focussing on a neutral power in an imperial context, we further highlight that the internment practices of the First World War were global.⁶

In thinking about internment in the First World War, particularly in the extra-European theatres, a transimperial perspective is useful. Captives often moved across imperial boundaries; the infrastructure of the internment camps, or at least the expectation of what it should consist of, was universal across the European empires in Africa. This was important in the colonial context where white captives expected treatment to correspond to their racial status.

Studies on transimperialism ask us to consider European expansionism as a shared project and to move the history of imperialism away from the dominating nationalised perspective of the British Empire. Transimperial approaches shed light on how imperial competition, cooperation, and connectivity are entangled processes.⁷ The wartime management of internment in Spain – a neutral empire sandwiched between other imperial belligerents – provides a good case study for this approach. Although empires competed with one another for territory, influence, and resources, their approach to civilian and military administration was similar.⁸

Our case study sheds light on the transimperial dimension of this history, as the German internees traversed imperial borders; it also shows how internment involved cooperation among imperial powers, institutionalising internment practices worldwide. In the global network

of camps, internees became transimperial travellers who were often moved from one camp to another across imperial boundaries. Though it remained neutral, Spain provides a good example of this transimperial aspect of the war. It was not only a transit point for those being repatriated to Germany, but also a final destination for many from the Cameroon front.

Spain also placed itself within the global humanitarian network of care for internees. Historiography on Spanish neutrality currently focuses on two main strands: first, as a passive stage where belligerent powers engaged in strategic, economic, and intelligence manoeuvres against each other⁹; and second, from a cultural history approach, by examining tensions and manifestations of allegiances to different belligerent camps by (mainly male) Spanish intellectuals.¹⁰ Recently, the latter approach has taken a transnational turn in the work of scholars like Maximiliano Fuentes Codera, who explores the transfer of cultural knowledge between Argentina and Spain during the war.¹¹ Indeed, the rediscovery of archival material in the Royal Palace Archive reveals an active (neutral) participation in the global conflict and brings Spain into the ambit of historical studies on humanitarianism.¹²

This is best highlighted in the work of the European War Office, a blend of personal and state humanitarian efforts located in Madrid's Royal Palace, and through which Spain's humanitarian efforts reached across social classes, rival camps, and continents. Established in 1915 in response to numerous requests directed to King Alfonso XIII from around the world seeking information on the whereabouts, treatment, and repatriation of loved ones – both soldiers and civilians – the Office amassed a significant collection of letters and over 180,000 files stored in the Royal Palace Archive. Spain's humanitarian contributions demonstrate that neutrals took an active part in the war, and the case examined in this article further illustrates Spain's concept of neutrality through its concern for the well-being of peoples from belligerent nations. As argued by Maartje Abbenhuis and Ismee Tames, 'only by integrating the roles and experiences of neutral and belligerent states and communities across the world can we truly appreciate the conflict's many metamorphoses and understand it as a "total war" and "global tragedy"'.¹³

The camp networks established during the Great War involved not only the internment of diverse peoples in various geographies but also movements of internees within these webs. Our article builds and expands on this insight by analysing a case study from a non-belligerent empire,

further underscoring the mobility of First World War internment. Most of the members of the German forces in Cameroon were of African descent. While very few of them were transferred to mainland Spain, our article sheds light on the significance of African-descended soldiers in belligerent armies.¹⁴

The remainder of the article is organised in five sections plus a conclusion. It starts with a literature review on German-Cameroonian internment in global contexts, followed by an exploration of the different stages and locations of the transimperial internment experience, beginning on Fernando Po and then moving to mainland Spain, including the later repatriation of many internees. It then turns to explore the echoes and legacies of the internment post-war before offering some concluding remarks.

German-Cameroonian Internment in a Global Context

The First World War, with its vast migrations of troops, carriers, and labourers across continents, showed (or reminded) many people that much of the world had been colonised.¹⁵ Africa was an important staging point in the war, particularly Egypt, which operated as the hub of the British Empire's war effort via the Suez Canal. The outbreak of war in Europe in 1914 also saw renewed imperial competition in Africa as the Entente moved to take over Germany's imperial possessions. Cameroon had been a German colony since 1884, but a relatively brief Anglo-French campaign meant that Germany had lost control of the region by 1916. With the expulsion of the German population, Cameroonians became aware of the transimperial nature of the conflict, experiencing the transfer of their homeland from one empire to another. Indeed, many Cameroonians tried to influence the war's outcome by taking up arms to fight alongside German forces or petitioning the nascent League of Nations to prioritise their demands when determining how the colony would be managed after Germany's defeat.¹⁶

In recent years, the decades after the First World War in Cameroon have received renewed attention; they have been covered in military histories of the conflict and in discussions on the internment of German settlers from the colony.¹⁷ The publication of modern analyses of the Cameroonian dimension of the First World War mean that it is no longer a forgotten front of the global conflict and, indeed, the study of the war

from this extra-European perspective helps, as Michelle Moyd states, to consider what 'world' in 'First World War' means.¹⁸

While the fighting was relatively light by First World War standards, the effects of the conflict in Cameroon were felt in tangible ways, with the defeat of German forces sparking a refugee crisis. George Njung estimates that around 100,000 people fled into Spanish Guinea in 1915.¹⁹ In what may be a surprising turn of events, there is now more scholarly work on the experience of Cameroonians than on the German officers.²⁰ Thanks to the work of Robert O'Neill, we have illuminating accounts from soldiers and the women and children who followed them into internment, including testimony from one Godfred Buma, who was born in the camp on Fernando Po.²¹ The white Europeans who are the focus of this article were but a small minority of those caught up in the migratory chaos of the First World War. Therefore, it is understandable that the focus of previous research has been on the war's impact on Cameroon.

However, these Europeans and their internment remain of interest as a case study of the connection between Africa and Europe during the Great War and the discourse on humanitarian assistance. The existing literature on the retreat of German forces into Spanish Guinea and their evacuation to mainland Spain is fragmented and, in certain instances, lacking depth from a historian's perspective. Despite titles suggesting comprehensive coverage of the internment of Germans in Spanish territories, none properly addresses the entire internment journey.

Up to now, the focus was on specific geographic sections of the overall experience. For instance, Jacqueline de Vries' extensively researched piece concentrates on internment in Fernando Po, omitting the internment in mainland Spain.²² (Indeed, one of the authors of the current article, Mahon Murphy, is guilty of the same omission in his 2017 work on internment and the collapse of the German empire.) De Vries' approach is largely rooted in anthropological research in Cameroon, specifically centred on missionary activities. Although the internment is viewed mainly through a British lens, de Vries herself acknowledges the necessity of delving into 'Spanish and French archives and publications [...] to clarify the Spanish and French perspectives'.²³

In contrast, Eduardo González Calleja's work centres on mainland Spain, specifically delving into the nature of internment at the major sites – Alcalá, Pamplona, and Zaragoza – and drawing on select Spanish sources that offer a detailed exploration of escape attempts.²⁴ By analysing the personal writings (ego-documents) of four German internees,

literary scholar Isabel Gutierrez Koester presents a distinctive viewpoint. Despite lacking a detailed account of the Germans' arrival in Spain, her study suggests that the German community who remained in Spain after the war became influential.²⁵

As argued by Maartje Abbenhuis and Ismee Tames, 'if we take seriously the premise that what set this war apart from all its predecessors was its global reach [. . .], then we must do more to understand and appreciate the roles played by neutral states and neutral subjects'.²⁶ By adopting a global approach encompassing various sources and geographical standpoints, this article explores previously overlooked themes and highlights the internment of Germans from Cameroon in Spain as an example of transimperial entanglement during the First World War. This case study shows that even within neutral territories, internment entailed mobility and, as with the transfer of German captives from Fernando Po to mainland Spain, it often involved moving from one continent to another.

Germans as Guests: from Fernando Po to Spain

A British telegram reported that on 16 April 1916, a convoy comprising two Spanish steamships, *Isla de Panay* and *Cataluña*, escorted by the Spanish warship *Extremadura*, had set sail from Fernando Po for Las Palmas and Cádiz. *Isla de Panay* carried 282 interned Germans, including the former German governor of Cameroon, Karl Ebermaier, while *Cataluña* transported 555 persons.²⁷ According to reports from the British ambassador to Spain, Arthur Hardinge, Prime Minister Álvaro de Figueroa (the Count of Romanones) had informed him that these refugees would be relocated to Logroño, Cuenca, Zaragoza, Teruel, and Orduña.²⁸ However, on 4 May 1916, the British Embassy in Madrid notified Foreign Minister Edward Grey that, although the convoy had halted in Las Palmas and was still en route to Cádiz, the refugees would be allocated to Pamplona, Zaragoza, Aranjuez, and Alcalá de Henares. Only the ex-governor and the commanding officer, along with a small group of support staff, were to be interned at Madrid. Additionally, the Convent of Orduña had been designated for Catholics.²⁹

Upon their early morning arrival in Cádiz on 4 May, the internees from Cameroon boarded the first train bound for Alcalá de Henares at 11:35 am, swiftly followed by a second train departing for Pamplona at 12:35 pm. A subset of 16 individuals from the contingent, indisposed due to various ailments, were granted permission to remain in Cádiz under the care of the military hospital. Prior to their departure, all internees were asked to sign

a written pledge of honour, committing to a temporary constraint – lasting 14 days – while awaiting authorisation from Germany to endorse a more comprehensive internment agreement for the duration of the war.³⁰

This procedure triggered a series of diplomatic exchanges through *notes verbales* between the Spanish and German authorities. The Berlin government asserted its unwillingness to sanction a broad commitment, advocating instead for specific pledges delineating permissible activities, such as strolls or participation in specific activities.³¹ Nevertheless, Spanish documentation reveals that the German contingent from Cameroon extended their commitments in late May and once again in June, highlighting a nuanced evolution in the unfolding diplomatic negotiations regarding their internment in Spain.³²

To illustrate the variety of the internee population, we list here the names of six women interned at Aranjuez, as recorded by the head military officer of the region upon their arrival: Olga Ramos Mayer, the wife of Wilhelm Mayer; Mathilde Schüttel, wife of Wilhelm Schüttel; Deva Siebert, wife of Johannes Siebert; two sisters from the Pallottiner Mission, Sister Paneratia Heine and Sister Dorothea Petz; and Katharina (listed as Catarina) Atangana, described as 'Black'.³⁴ Wilhelm Mayer was an engineer who had evidently married a Spanish woman, while Schüttel and Siebert were Protestant missionaries. It seems that Katharina Atangana's father, Karl the Paramount Leader of the Ewondo-Bane, had sent his daughter with the missionaries to avoid internment and also to continue her education in Germany.³⁵ Her father would later follow the European officers to Spain and go to great lengths to be reunited with his daughter so that they could return to Cameroon together.³⁶

Of the 197 males between the ages of 17 and 55 interned at Pamplona, 38 were civilians, while 159 were military personnel (Table 1). Among the civilians, a wide range of professions was noted, the most common, with nine individuals, being 'Kaufmann' or merchant, followed by 'Rechnungsbeamter' (clerk), with three, and 'Lokomotivführer' (train conductor), also with three. There was also a 'Pflanzer' (planter), Wilhelm Hornung, and a 'Sägemeister' (sawmill supervisor), Xaver Gerstner.³⁷

Table 1. Number of Germans interned in Spain, compiled on 19 May 1916.³³

	Zaragoza	Pamplona	Aranjuez	Alcalá	Cádiz	Total
Women	14	1	6	0	0	21
Children	7	0	2	0	0	9
Missionaries	8	0	6	2	1	17
Medical and sanitary personnel	25	19	0	5	2	51
Males aged 17–55	302	197	24	157	5	685
Males under 17 and over 55	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	356	217	38	164	8	783

As the table above shows, the majority of males from the German-Cameroonian contingent arriving in Spain were interned at Zaragoza; this group included the largest number of civilians (which also accounts for the high number of women in Zaragoza) as well as a mix of sub-officers and soldiers (see Table 1). As reported by a local newspaper in April 1917, a group of interned Germans in Zaragoza, together with some local residents, rented vacant lots and transformed them into 'a magnificent football field'.³⁸ The team who played there was referred to in various reports as either *Alemanes* or *Camerón FC*.³⁹ In contrast, most sub-officers were interned in Alcalá de Henares, while most rank-and-file soldiers were sent to Pamplona.⁴⁰ Although there was some overlap, internees were grouped primarily by status (civilian or military) and military rank.

Only senior officials of the German contingent were permitted to remain in central Madrid. Governor Ebermaier, was interned at the Palace Hotel in Madrid. In mid-May 1916, the German ambassador, Max von Ratibor und Corvey (Prince Ratibor), requested permission for Ebermaier to visit the various internment sites so that he might have direct contact with his former troops, arguing that 'questions will often be raised [by the internees], prompting a desire for verbal treatment'.⁴¹ Following internal government consultations with the President of the Spanish Government, the Count of Romanones, the request was denied, noting that 'Ebermaier lacks the authority and faculties to carry out, in our territory, the functions he seeks to attribute to himself'.⁴² The communication to the German ambassador also stated that Ebermaier 'should not be absent from Madrid'.⁴³ Prince Ratibor protested the proscription, citing the lack of a clear reason, though he expressed his belief that Ebermaier's confinement in Madrid would not be an indefinite arrangement.⁴⁴

Despite the initial refusal, the Spanish government eventually permitted Ebermaier to travel to the internment locations. This special dispensation was granted specifically so that Ebermaier could accompany a Chilean delegate, Mr. Wachowski, from the Bureau International 'Kriegsgefangenenhilfe der christlichen Vereine junger Männer', and solely for the purpose of addressing matters that concerned the internees' situation.⁴⁵ Additionally, the opening of an office was sanctioned to handle the liquidation of assets belonging to the German imperial government that Ebermaier and his staff had brought from Cameroon. In late October, the French Embassy complained to Minister of State Amalio Gimeno that Ebermaier, along with the commander of the

Schutztruppen, Emil Zimmerman, had established an 'Imperial Government of Cameroon' in Spain, headquartered at Calle Fortuny 3, and was receiving correspondence under the address 'Kamerun-Madrid'.⁴⁶ In response, Gimeno promptly wrote to Ratibor, expressing the expectation that the liquidation of assets should have concluded by now, and therefore, the office no longer needed to remain open.

Ebermaier was a prolific writer of correspondence to the German colonial office about the plight of the internees. In addition, the public memory of the internment of Germans from Cameroon in Spain was already being formed while the war and the internment were ongoing. Accounts of the war in Cameroon were written by those who were directly involved in the conflict, whether as soldiers or interned/expelled civilians and missionaries. An example of the content of these publications is Hermann Skolaster's *Krieg im Busch*, which devotes much attention to the transfer to Fernando Po and then to Spain.

Skolaster was a military chaplain and member of the Pallottine Catholic order; he penned a fond memory of his and his fellow Germans' arrival in Seville from Fernando Po. While they had been warmly received at all their stops, the station in Seville was teeming with people: 'Every German who could get off work was present. But the Spanish population also vied with the Germans to give us a pleasant surprise. First there was free beer. Listen and be amazed. Free beer for 800 people who came from Africa and are descendants of those from both sides of the Rhine!'⁴⁷

Indeed, the warm welcome and good treatment afforded to the Germans during their captivity in Spain was an established narrative during the war. Greta Kühnhold, a missionary repatriated from Cameroon, noted in an article in the 20 July 1916 edition of the *Deutsche Kolonialzeitung*, 'it is well known that the Spanish showed us Germans great hospitality'.⁴⁸ As a chaplain, Skolaster was able to return to Germany by the end of 1916. His war memoir was published in 1918, and he finished the text by noting that he was due to be drafted into the army again to serve as a military chaplain on the Eastern Front. It is difficult to judge how many people actually read his memoir, but it is one of the most extensive accounts of the transfer from Fernando Po to Spain to be published in wartime.

The positive impression of Spain was further reinforced by the official Spanish position on internment – Skolaster and his colleagues had to pledge not to move residence and needed permission from the local commandant when travelling, but in other respects he noted that there

was very little to distinguish Germans already residing in Spain from those brought from Africa.⁴⁹ Nevertheless, and despite efforts to learn Spanish, the internees felt like strangers in Spain, money was scarce, and they longed for home.⁵⁰

During this period, many letters concerning Germans from Cameroon were received at the European War Office in the Spanish Royal Palace.⁵¹ Although most of the inquiries are from May or June 1916, the first cases involving German individuals in Cameroon actually predate the German army's retreat to Spanish Guinea. One such case was Elisabeth Neuse's inquiry (originating from Lüneburg near Hannover) about her two brothers, notably the eldest, Eberhard, who had been stationed in Yaoundé and had not been heard from for a year.⁵² One of the earliest appeals following the German troops' flight to Guinea came from Sophie Wieczorkiwicz in Berlin, seeking information about her fiancé, Max Hermann Schmidt, originally from Thüringen.⁵³

Numerous family members seeking information about their loved ones who corresponded from Germany did so after reading in the magazine *Kolonie und Heimat*, the official journal of the Women's Association of the German Colonial Society (*Organ des Frauenbundes der Deutschen Kolonialgesellschaft*), that their relatives had been interned in Spanish territories. Reports of Germans from Cameroon in Spanish territory gave tentative numbers of those held, to be confirmed by Spanish authorities.⁵⁴ The newspaper further organised a collection drive to aid the internees who had come from Cameroon, explaining that Crown Princess Cecilie would send the goods to Spain on 5 June 1916. This effort would not only bring much-needed supplies to the Germans in Spain, but was also to act as an information mission to obtain concrete details on who was being held in Spain.⁵⁵

Kolonie und Heimat and the *Deutsche Kolonialzeitung* were the main public sources of information on the whereabouts of Germans from Cameroon; both reprinted telegrams from Madrid verbatim and published internee lists.⁵⁶ In a report on their arrival in Spain, lacking any photographic material of the internees themselves, the newspaper featured stock pictures of the cities of Cádiz and Madrid, with the Royal Palace featuring prominently, along with a description of the warm welcome extended to the new arrivals by the Spanish public.⁵⁷

Perfect Freedom? Internment on Fernando Po

Despite the transfers to Spain, a great many internees remained in camps on Fernando Po. Islands, by their very geography, were prime locations for internment camps. Examples during the First World War are numerous, from the Isle of Man in Britain to Matiu/Somes in New Zealand and Ninoshima in Japan. Fernando Po was no different.

On 13 September 1916, Ángel Barrera, the governor of Spanish Guinea, penned a detailed letter to General Juan Loriga at the Royal Palace in Madrid, who served as the king's assistant secretary. Born in Burgos in 1863, Barrera served as governor twice, initially for a brief period from September 1906 to February 1907, and subsequently for a much longer tenure from September 1910 to February 1924. He passed away only three years later, in 1927. Barrera's brothers, José and Emilio, also pursued military careers: José María served as vice admiral of the Armada and as aide-de-camp to Alfonso XIII, while Emilio held a senior position in the Spanish African Army and later became a lieutenant general. Barrera's support within the palace, coupled with his strong relationships with both liberal and conservative politicians, partly explains his 14-year tenure in the colony. Barrera authored 'What the Spanish possessions in the Gulf of Guinea are and what they should be' (*Lo que son y lo que deben ser las posesiones españolas del Golfo de Guinea*) in 1907.⁵⁸

Although the new Colonial Charter, the *Estatuto Orgánico de la Colonia*, of July 1904 allowed for a civilian to hold the governorship of the Spanish Territories of the Gulf of Guinea (Spanish Equatorial Guinea's official name), Barrera, like nearly all his predecessors, was a naval officer with ample prior experience (in the Philippines for Barrera, and either the Philippines or the Antilles for his forerunners). The statute specified that the governor would be appointed freely by the Council of Ministers through a royal decree, upon the recommendation of the minister of state. While the governor was required to report to the minister of state, his powers were extensive. Article 13 granted him authority to 'communicate directly on colonial matters with Spain's representatives, diplomatic and consular agents in Africa, and with the superior authorities of foreign territories or colonies'. Importantly, Article 3 empowered the governor to 'take whatever measures deemed necessary to preserve peace within and security outside the territories under his charge, while keeping the Ministry of State duly informed'.⁵⁹ These powers would shape Barrera's actions throughout the war and during the internment of the German Cameroonians.

In his 1916 letter, Barrera included several photographs (see [Figures 1, 2 and 3](#)) showing the new internment camps in Fernando Po, believing that the king would take pleasure in seeing them. These photographs – published here for the first time in an international scholarly journal – were attached to General Barrera’s private letter to the king’s private secretary, intended to be shared and shown to Alfonso XIII, so they were not for public consumption. Barrera described how the camps were constructed on what was once an ancient forest, ‘a centuries-old forest where a machete had never been used to clear the underbrush’. He mentioned that one of the camps was erected on the neglected portion of a property belonging to a German, Moritz, which had also been a forest, and that ‘the immense work that has been done now truly results in a beauty’. While enthusiastic about the quality of the camps, Barrera complained that ‘the entire internment has taken ten years off my life’.⁶⁰ He reported that, at that moment, the headcount of internees in Fernando Po had reached 15,000. A British survey suggested similar figures – around 50 German officers, along with 10,000 native troops and 5,000 carriers.⁶¹ Barrera detailed the severe scarcity of food from 16 April to 26 June, acknowledging that this situation ‘kept me awake at night’.⁶²



Figure 1. Map of the Island of Fernando Po with newly-built internment camps, sent by Barrera with a letter addressed to the king’s private secretary. Box 188, Royal Palace Archive.



Figure 2. Photographs of the internment camps, sent by Barrera with a letter addressed to the king's private secretary. Box 188, Royal Palace Archive.



Figure 3. German Cameroonians military musicians interned in Fernando Po. Box 188, Royal Palace Archive.

On 28 October 1916, the British War Office urged the Foreign Office in London to collaborate with the French government. The joint effort aimed to press the Spanish government on the swift implementation of negotiated plans: the evacuation of all remaining German personnel in Fernando Po to Spain and the repatriation of native troops and non-combatants to Cameroon.⁶³ On 6 October 1916, another report from the British senior naval officer in the West Coast of Africa underscored the importance of removing the Germans from Fernando Po. It emphasised the limited troops available to both the French and the British in the region – approximately 1,000 British troops in Nigeria and a similar French contingent – compared to the 10,000 German soldiers in Fernando Po, supervised by ‘a Spanish guard of 125 native troops’.⁶⁴

In November and December 1916, about eight months after most of the German officers in Cameroon had arrived in the Iberian Peninsula, the British and French diplomatic corps in Madrid expressed a strong desire for the relocation of all remaining German officers in Cameroon to mainland Spain and the return of Cameroonians who had sought refuge on the island of Fernando Po to Cameroon. According to a Spanish Ministry of State (Spanish Foreign Office) policy report dated 20 November 1916, the government had agreed to this and formulated a plan to ensure the availability of military ships, a commercial transatlantic vessel, and Spanish officers familiar with the German language for the venture, although a specific date had not been set.

Pursuing the matter and striving for prompt action, the British ambassador in Spain, Hardinge, corresponded with Spanish Minister of State Gimeno. Hardinge asked Gimeno to provide a date ‘at which the natives may be expected to land in the Río Muni Colony, so that their arrival there may coincide as closely as possible with that of the Officer to be deputed [...] by the French and British Governments’. Their proposal involved dispatching a British and a French officer to assure, in Hardinge’s words, ‘the natives that they could rely not merely upon impunity for their past services to our enemies but also upon friendly treatment at the hands of the new Allied Authorities in the conquered German Territory’.⁶⁵

By then, Valentine Phillimore, the British senior officer in the West Coast of Africa, had already corresponded with Barrera. In his letter, Phillimore relayed that he had received information indicating a definite promise from Count Romanones, then Spanish prime minister, regarding the swift transfer of German prisoners interned in Fernando Po. Phillimore specifically sought details, including their names, ranks, and the ship on

which they would embark.⁶⁶ On the same day, Barrera responded from Santa Isabel, stating that he had no information from his government regarding the matter.⁶⁷

However, a newly referenced telegram from Barrera, dated 18 December 1916, seems to have drastically changed the course of events. Barrera, leveraging his on-the-ground knowledge, made a compelling case to Madrid, arguing that transporting the Cameroonians back to Río Muni was morally unacceptable. He explained to the Spanish government that 'sending the natives to the mainland during rainy season condemns many to death. As their camp was just being rebuilt after the terrible crisis suffered during the war and evacuation, it is not the same to have brought them from the mainland as it is to take them from here to a place where everything is lacking'. He further expressed that the potential 'disaster and moral responsibility would be immense' if they were to die now.⁶⁸

If the intention was to relocate them to the mainland, Barrera urged a modified approach in an attempt to salvage the situation. His proposal involved sending an initial group of 200 individuals to build shelters in Río Muni for the subsequent arrivals, gradually moving them in smaller groups. Barrera politely acknowledged in the telegram that his recommendation was motivated by 'patriotism' despite conflicting with Spain's official policy. He even offered to resign if his reasons were not persuasive, citing his own 'sincere admission of my inadequacy' in satisfactorily resolving this issue in the event all the Cameroonians were transported immediately to mainland Spanish Guinea.⁶⁹ Barrera made it clear that he would not be responsible for implementing such a policy.

Hence, it is not surprising that the internationally published literature, predominantly relying on British sources, portrays the Spanish governor of Guinea as pro-German.⁷⁰ In fact, British archival materials at times explicitly label Barrera as 'pro-German'⁷¹ or mention his 'known sympathies'.⁷² However, the reality depicted in the archival sources is more complex. In this context, the Allies appear to be the ones attempting to coerce or pressure the Spanish government, while Barrera aims to keep the Allies out of all decision-making in Spanish Guinea with regard to the internees on account of practical feasibility, a duty to safeguard the internees, a sense of moral obligation, and to confirm Spain's neutrality. This underscores the importance of including sources from neutral countries to gain a more nuanced understanding of the interactions between belligerent parties regarding internment.

In a report detailing a conversation with Barrera in late December, Phillimore conveyed that Barrera had informed him of his intention to resign because he considered the transfer of people a breach of the Hague Convention. Barrera suggested that the Allies must have pressured his government to consent to such a measure and predicted that the Allies would eventually pay for the wrong done to Spain. Phillimore countered that it was inconceivable that the Allies would threaten Spain. He argued that the Hague Convention had been consistently violated by the Germans, reducing its significance, and that friendly arrangements between governments should prevail. Phillimore asserted that 'neither he nor I had any voice in their decisions, that all we had to do was to carry out orders'.⁷³

In August 1917, Barrera received letters addressed to the French governor of Cameroon, originally written between January and May 1917 by Cameroonians in Yaoundé or Douala. Though addressed to the governor, these letters included content intended for their family members interned in Fernando Po, in hopes that the French governor would forward them. The correspondence predominantly pleaded for the return of their relatives to Cameroon. These missives varied from emotional pleas, such as, 'I want to bring back all my brothers and sisters. I am very sad here and cannot live well without my siblings', expressed by Vitus Atangana,⁷⁴ to more reasoned petitions, such as, 'we can't sustain ourselves without you', and broader concerns affecting the entire community. For instance, 'We lament the absence of our Chief Efa-Elle [Karl Atangana] here in Yaoundé. No community can exist without a Chief, and a forest will not be called a forest without its large trees. Similarly, we cannot live without our Chief. We will not find peace here without the return of our respected Chiefs; our country will soon decline. We lament with tears the absence of our respected Chiefs in Fernando Poo'.⁷⁵

On 18 February 1918, Barrera shared with the French governor in Douala several letters from the internees written in response to the missives their families in Cameroon had sent earlier. Barrera conveyed his attempts to persuade the internees to return, noting that Max Esengue was the sole individual to accept the offer, while all the others had chosen to remain in Fernando Po. Barrera expressed regret for his unsuccessful persuasion but indicated that after 16 months of war, the Cameroonians had found solace in the Spanish colony. As indicated to the French governor in an earlier missive dated 9 October 1917, 'they realise they

face no difficulties in this colony, and by following the laws, they enjoy perfect freedom. They have cleared the land where they have settled, built their houses, made plantations, and are content, not desiring to leave for the moment'.⁷⁶

Internment in Spain: Experience and Repatriation

On her return to her home in Hamburg in March 1915, Magda Bubeck was one of many to fill out a questionnaire issued by the *Abteilung für Requisitionen in Strafsachen* (Department for Requisitions in Criminal Matters). Although the results of the questionnaire were never used to put forward a legal challenge to counter Allied anti-German propaganda, they provide interesting biographies of the women and men of non-combatant age who were repatriated to Germany in early 1915 after the fall of Douala.

At the time of the outbreak of war in Europe, Bubeck had been living in the coastal town of Kribi for about two years with her husband, Gustav, who was a buyer for the Lehman & Bartels company based there. Following German orders, she and her husband moved to Buea when war broke out. After British forces arrived in the town in November, she was taken to Douala along with other German women from the colony. She and the other women had to sign an oath not to commit any seditious acts and to hand over any weapons in their possession.⁷⁷

From Douala they were taken to Victoria (now Limbé) to await repatriation on the British steamship *Appam*. Reflecting on her departure for Europe, Bubeck noted, 'You can imagine how horrible the thought was to have to leave our beautiful colony, where the Germans had created a bit of culture with so much effort and diligence. How would we find it again? A rainy season will overgrow everything. But we could do nothing about it, we were prisoners and had to submit'.⁷⁸

On board the *Appam*, the passengers were not sure whether they would be repatriated or interned in one of the Allied colonies. They were particularly worried that they would be sent to Dahomey (Benin), where, according to rumours circulating among German settlers early in the war, internees were treated poorly. Only upon arrival in Liverpool did they find out that the women on board were to be sent back to Germany and that the US consul would organise accommodation for them in Britain while they awaited their onward journey from Tilbury to Hamburg via Rotterdam. Bubeck's statement is the most detailed of

those that have survived in German archives. She also related her experiences in the press, noting that she had published articles in the *Rostocker Zeitung* and *Kolonie und Heimat*.

She heard from her husband that their house in Kribi had been looted and vandalised. Indeed, in *Kolonie und Heimat* she wrote that an employee of her husband's had caught two thieves exiting the property with a large bundle of her silver and crystal. Both were apparently shot on the spot.⁷⁹ While she did not state how her husband had been able to contact her, she noted in her statement to the *Abteilung für Requisitionen in Strafsachen* that he was then in Río Muni. While Magda Bubeck was journeying back to Germany, he had escaped into Spanish territory with the German forces.

However, Magda's stay in Germany was brief. In September 1916, approximately five months after his arrival on the Iberian Peninsula, Gustav Bubeck sought permission from Spanish Minister of State Gimeno, through the German ambassador, to leave his internment in Madrid.⁸⁰ Serving as an interpreter for Ebermaier, Gustav intended to travel to Vigo, the Spanish coastal town where his wife was due to arrive on a ship from neutral Amsterdam on 21 September. The Spanish ministers of both war and state agreed to the request, on the condition that Gustav and Magda promptly return to Madrid upon her arrival.⁸¹

Another civilian internee, Hans Paschon, based in Zaragoza, also embarked on a journey to Vigo to reunite with his wife. This arrangement highlights the practice of allowing the wives of internees to enter Spain and re-join their husbands. Despite not being officially interned themselves, these women had a globally mobile experience, journeying from Cameroon to Britain, Germany, and Spain, while their husbands navigated internment in Cameroon and Spain during the course of the war.

In mainland Spain, on 11 December 1917, a group of German civilians who had journeyed from Fernando Po with the German officers petitioned the Spanish government. They requested compensation equivalent to the salary provided to German military internees. Their plea stemmed from a discrepancy between the assurances given by the German government before their voyage to Spain and the reality they encountered upon arrival. The German civilians were promised freedom in Spain, as they had not taken up arms. However, upon reaching Spain, they were classified as internees.

Despite their efforts to communicate with Germany for their release, they had not made any progress. As a result, they now sought rights associated with internment, particularly requesting reimbursement for their upkeep. In their letter, they proposed a compensation of six pesetas per day, accounting for the rising cost of provisions, starting from the day they had been interned initially, nearly 20 months earlier.⁸² The letter, signed by Alfred Rittersdorf and 18 other male German internees, was dispatched from Zaragoza, though it was also written on behalf of some civilians interned in Pamplona. Another letter from Rittersdorf, dated 26 February 1918, arrived at the Ministry of State to remind them of the initial request.⁸³ This communication referred to the application of the articles of the Hague Convention to the internees. Simultaneously, Spain and Germany were already engaged in correspondence regarding the Spanish government's decision to approve the request made by the group of German civilians.

An illuminating incident characterises the Spanish government's interactions with the diverse individuals who arrived from Cameroon in 1916. The group comprised not only civilian and military Germans but also African house servants. Paul Bieger, a German military officer interned in Zaragoza, for example, had brought along his house servant, Nsango. However, in early 1917, Bieger chose to fire him. Following his dismissal, Nsango travelled to Barcelona with the aim of boarding a ship back to Cameroon.⁸⁴ The ship company, presuming he was interned and lacking a passport or expedited papers from the Spanish Ministry of State, denied him boarding.⁸⁵ This predicament prompted intervention from the Spanish minister of state, affirming that Nsango was not interned and therefore free to depart Spain, and that he enjoyed the same rights as any other non-interned German subject in neutral Spain.⁸⁶

Many internees actively sought employment during their internment, often requiring relocation to a different city. In such cases, the German ambassador would request authorisation from the relevant Spanish authorities. An illustrative example is Wilhelm Albrecht, a military internee based in Zaragoza, who secured a position with the jewellery maker Nelken on Calle de la Cruz 15 in Madrid.⁸⁷ This opportunity, offered by Julio Nelken, a Prussian Jew settled in Madrid since the early 1890s, prompted Albrecht to seek a four-month leave to travel and stay in Madrid, starting in December 1917.⁸⁸

In August 1918, Albrecht once more applied for leave, this time for three months, with the aim of attending courses organised by the Board

for the Expansion of Scientific Studies and Research (*Junta de Ampliación de Estudios e Investigaciones Científicas*) in Madrid, the principal organisation in Spain for promoting research and scientific education. His goal was to further enrich the knowledge he had acquired during his two years of study at the University of Zaragoza.⁸⁹ Although Albrecht was granted permission to relocate, he could not attend the courses due to the influenza epidemic.⁹⁰ Consequently, Albrecht sought permission to extend his stay in Madrid, citing the 'initiation of commercial relations' in the city.⁹¹ The extension was granted and allowed Albrecht to remain in Madrid until the conclusion of his internment. In March 1919, having secured employment in Zaragoza, he expressed the desire to return there.⁹² Albrecht's example highlights how Spain controlled and authorised the regular movement of internees within the country. It also throws light on the resilience of internees who not only sought to sustain themselves through employment but also demonstrated a keen interest in education and professional development.

The Spanish authorities also had to resolve the issue of the internment of the remaining Cameroonians on Fernando Po. About a fortnight following the signing of the Treaty of Versailles on 10 July 1919, Barrera sent a message to the minister of state indicating that he had initiated the return of the interned Cameroonians from Fernando Po. Four hundred individuals had departed the previous day, but Barrera mentioned the need to conduct the process gradually.⁹³ Although the new French government in Cameroon pressed for completion within 20 days due to the French governor's desire to return to France, Barrera estimated it might take up to three months.⁹⁴ Barrera also noted the challenges of convincing the internees to return to Cameroon. Many hesitated due to the long distance to their inland homes and feared reliving the hardships and tragic losses, particularly among women and children, that they had experienced while journeying to Fernando Po.⁹⁵ Moreover, rumours about the treatment by the Allied powers of those loyal to the Germans added to their concerns.⁹⁶

In his communication with the minister, Barrera emphasised his efforts to secure reassurances from the French consul.⁹⁷ He sought guarantees that the repatriated individuals would not face repercussions upon their return, regardless of their past loyalties. Seemingly unaware of Barrera's plan and actions, the British and French ambassadors in Madrid separately sent similar letters to the Spanish minister of state. Their primary concern was the long duration of the initial transport by sea, expressing

dissatisfaction with the potential extension of the repatriation timeline, estimating that 'it would take several years to repatriate all the natives in question'.⁹⁸ Additionally, they raised objections, pointing out the potential damage to their nations' prestige.⁹⁹

An illustrative example is Karl Atangana's return to Cameroon. In July 1919, the German ambassador wrote to Spanish Minister of State Salvador Bermúdez de Castro (the Marquis of Lema) to inquire about the possibility of Atangana travelling from Fernando Po to Germany to retrieve his daughter, the above-mentioned Katharina, who was already there.¹⁰⁰ The Spanish government approved this request,¹⁰¹ informing Governor Barrera of the decision and also notifying the Allied government in Douala.¹⁰² As Paramount Leader of the Ewondo and Bane and recruiter of troops and carriers, Atangana was a key figure for the German administration of Yaoundé, so much so that Paul Dettinger, the interned district governor of Yaoundé, initially refused to leave Fernando Po without him.¹⁰³

Atangana arrived at the port of Cádiz on 22 September 1919 and promptly boarded the express train to Madrid, accompanied by his son, Juan Ndenge, setting himself up in lodgings only a 15 minute walk from the Royal Palace. The Spanish newspaper, *Nuevo Mundo*, featured Atangana as the prominent figure of the week, publishing a comprehensive photographic report on him and his son. The newspaper showcased 'Chief' Atangana in a European-style suit, being served a hot beverage by a Spanish maid, while his son was depicted in a 'modern flannel pyjama'.¹⁰⁴

The article displayed the superimposed portraits of the 'King of the Pamúes', as dubbed by the newspaper, and his heir. Interestingly, this title suggests that the newspaper felt Atangana had influence in Spanish colonial territory, as the Pamúes were the dominant group in Río Muni and speakers of Fang, a language intelligible to Ewondo speakers like Atangana. Additionally, the piece mentioned his 17-year-old daughter studying in Germany as well as Atangana's own academic achievements, noting his pursuit of two separate degrees in philosophy and science as well as engineering, and his affiliation with the Catholic faith.¹⁰⁵

The newspaper also noted Atangana's linguistic prowess in German, English, Italian, and Spanish, stating that his purpose in Madrid was twofold: to express gratitude to King Alfonso XIII for the years of protection in Fernando Po and to seek the king's assistance in ensuring his community's well-being upon their return to Cameroon, which was now under the control of the Allied powers.¹⁰⁶ A letter to the king's private

secretary, Emilio Torres, bore the inscription 'Carlos Atangana, Jefe Superior de los Jaundes y Banes del Kamerón', a title bestowed on him by the German government of Cameroon five months before the outbreak of war. In poetic Spanish, Atangana expressed his commitment to respecting the power balance emerging from the peace treaties. Yet, he earnestly implored for help, requesting that he, his family, and compatriots residing in Europe be allowed to return to Cameroon in peace.¹⁰⁷

Atangana was not allowed to travel to Germany, but in October 1919, King Alfonso XIII's private secretary issued a visa for his daughter to enter Spain. Once reunited in Spain, they travelled once more to Fernando Po, where Atangana paid out wages to those remaining internees who had been soldiers under his command, before arriving in Douala on 28 November 1920.¹⁰⁸ Like other returning Cameroonians, Atangana made one last transimperial journey – Douala was now part of French Cameroon. Atangana was viewed with suspicion by the new French authorities who prevented his return to Yaoundé, sending him instead to Dschang in the north of the country until they were satisfied that he would work with the new colonial administration.

Echoes and Legacies of Spanish Internment

Even after the signing of the Treaty of Versailles, which confirmed the loss of Germany's colonies, the German government of Cameroon in exile in Madrid attempted to administer the colony by acting as a guardian of its subjects. On 12 September 1919, in a radio communication to Germany's Colonial Office, the German Embassy in Madrid requested that Berlin secure safe passage for one Adija-Lifida and a retinue of 15 people to complete a pilgrimage to Mecca, to reward his 'faithful endurance' (*treues Aushalten*). Adija-Lifida was still interned in Fernando Po, but his transfer to Spain had been approved and the communication requested that the German Reich make the necessary arrangements for the remainder of his pilgrimage. The blunt reply was to query whether Adija-Lifida understood that Mecca was now in British hands.¹⁰⁹

While failing to secure passage of pilgrims to Mecca, the German Embassy at least had some success in getting German citizens back to Germany. On 11 October 1919, the Spanish government announced that it would allow internees to leave the country as long as they could provide a German travel pass stating their port of departure. The German government then began issuing travel grants for travel from Spanish ports to Germany via Italy, Switzerland, the Netherlands or

directly to Hamburg.¹¹⁰ To support those seeking repatriation, on 4 November 1919 the German authorities in Madrid sent Gustav Bubeck, Magda Bubeck's husband, to Bilbao to manage the influx of Germans who were to depart from the port. Bubeck acted as a liaison between the local consul and the captain of the ship *Atlante* (sometimes referred to as *Atlanta*), which was waiting to repatriate the arriving Germans. It fell to Bubeck to make sure that the catering and provisions such as blankets were up to standard.¹¹¹ The *Atlante* left Bilbao on 24 November with 319 persons on board for repatriation to Germany via Italy.¹¹²

A rare but illuminating example of the public memory of the war in Cameroon and the internment is Johann Philip Glock's 1922 book, *Es war einmal! ein Kameruner Immortellenkranz Deutscher Koloniallieder*—an unusual collection of 30 original songs that memorialise the war in Cameroon. In his foreword, Glock explained that he had written the songs to encourage Germans to sing about Cameroon to keep the memory of the colony alive and to expose what he saw as the lies and deceit of the Versailles Treaty. Glock had not been in Cameroon during the war, nor had he ever been to Africa, as evidenced by the book's inaccurate references to Cameroon's wildlife. He had served as a chaplain in the Prussian army during the 1870/71 war and was keen to point out his credentials as a veteran. However, he had family connections to the colony—two of his children were living in Cameroon at the outbreak of the war. His son had spent around ten years in Douala as a lieutenant and was killed in action on 6 September 1914. His daughter was expelled from Cameroon by British forces in 1914 after being rounded up and publicly paraded 'under the laughing eyes of the [people of] Douala'. According to Glock, her house was then ransacked and she was repatriated to Germany via Fernando Po, Spain, Italy, and Switzerland.¹¹³ He lost another son at Amiens in 1917 and another to influenza in 1920. (He had ten children in total.)

While unusual in their medium, the songs all touch on the usual tropes of the war in Cameroon. They contain praise for German fighters, such as Pallottiner missionary Alfons, who tried to blow up the British ship *The Dwarf* with an improvised torpedo, and allege the use of bounties (Kopfgeld) by the British to encourage the capture of German soldiers.¹¹⁴ Glock criticises Cameroonians who had taken up European customs but extols the Askari who fought for Germany. His songs describe the battles and the achievements of plantation owners and engineers in German Cameroon; he berates the British, French, Belgians, and other

colonial powers for their mismanagement of their empires, as a rebuke to the issuance of the League of Nations Mandate, which deemed Germany unfit to be an imperial power.

In his introduction, Glock claimed that his house in Bad Neuheim was a centre for knowledge transfer about the war, as many veterans and others returning from internment visited him there to discuss the war. He hoped that these conversations, coupled with his own research, would produce songs that were not only personal but also authentic. The foreword was wittingly signed on the 50th anniversary of the Kaiser's proclamation of the German empire in Versailles on 18 January 1871.

Glock recounts the transferred knowledge of internment across wars, recalling the Boer concentration camps as well as the camp system established in India as evidence of Britain's unworthiness to run an empire. For France, too, he cites the treatment of people in Madagascar and wartime examples of the French internment camps in Abomey (Dahomey), recounting forced labour and punishments such as floggings with hippo-hide whips and the application of thumb-screws, all done by indigenous Black soldiers on defenceless Germans. He reserves praise for Spain and Fernando Po in the song *Fernando Poo, das Pathmos der Kameruner Exulanten*, describing the island as a haven from war, raids by British 'gentlemen' and attacks by 'schwarze Wichter' (black goblins). Fernando Po was also a haven from internment by the Allied forces, as he says, and from France's 'eternal shame' (internment in Dahomey).

Glock based his praise of Spain and condemnation of the Allies on his imagining of how the Germans had experienced their time in captivity. This is similar to the imagined encounters of 'Germans' with 'natives' in the colonial fantasy as formulated by Susan Zantop, with Glock infusing a German Heimatlied style.¹¹⁵ Indeed, with the loss of Cameroon and Germans being barred from travelling to the territory until the mid-1920s, Glock sings of the Kamerun Collection at the Stuttgart Völker Museum as a site of memory where one can go to remember those who had worked (and died) to create German Cameroon. Many, however, did not return to Cameroon from Germany, or write about it, and quite a few chose to remain in Spain, making it the final stop on their transimperial journey.

Conclusions

The outbreak of the First World War created a global network of internment facilities on an unprecedented scale. The belligerent

empires operated internment camps in their African territories not only for combatant prisoners of war but also for civilian internees. Our case study of German internees in Spanish Guinea and their transfer to Spain highlights that transcontinental internment was not the exclusive preserve of the belligerent powers. Even in the Spanish case, one can see that First World War internment was a much more mobile affair than previously assumed.

The German army's retreat from Cameroon into neutral Spanish territory sheds light on how the Spanish government navigated pressures from the belligerent powers concerning its African dominions. The establishment of a European War Office illustrates how Spain maintained its neutral stance as a European power while engaging in humanitarian interventions within a lingering imperial context. The First World War involved a redrawing of the imperial map, with the German army in Cameroon embarking on what became a transimperial and transcontinental journey to internment in a neutral country.

We structured our article to outline the diverse trajectories experienced by German Cameroonians as they sought refuge in Spanish Guinea during and immediately after the First World War. Our aim was to delineate their overarching journeys, highlighting the global mobility of their internment. However, prospective research avenues could delve more deeply into distinct geographical segments of these routes, spanning Fernando Po, Spain, Germany, or Cameroon, which still remain understudied. Alternatively, future research could concentrate on specific subgroups within the larger cohort – civilians, military officers, women, European or African communities – and engage in comparative analyses. Another approach could involve a detailed exploration of microhistories, focusing on individual narratives.

Some interned Germans remained in Spain after the war, and their story continues to capture the imagination of Spanish journalists and novelists. The incident reported in *The Daily Telegraph* and quoted at the beginning of this article, where a young woman allegedly killed a German in self-defence, was recounted as true by the exiled Spanish author Ramón J. Sender in his 1957 autobiography/autofiction.¹¹⁶ As recently as April 2024, Sergio del Molino published a novel titled *The Germans (Los alemanes)* that portrays several generations of Germans from Cameroon who settled in Zaragoza. In a promotional interview, del Molino emphatically stated, 'This story was completely unknown, utterly forgotten'.¹¹⁷

To address and correct such historical lacunae, researchers need to adopt a methodology akin to our approach, bringing together various sources such as government documents, ego-documents, newspapers, photographs, letters, memoirs, and others, all originating from diverse linguistic and national backgrounds. This approach is essential to construct a nuanced narrative capable of rectifying prevailing myths and shedding light on a topic that has traditionally been marginalised, thereby contributing further to our understanding of the global dimensions of the First World War.

Johann Philip Glock sang about Fernando Po as being a weathervane for German settlers in Cameroon, who could judge the climate based on the clouds coming from the island. In a similar manner, the internment of Germans on Fernando Po and their subsequent transfer to Spain can serve as a weathervane to assess the role of Spanish neutrality during the war. Glock's ode to Fernando Po was based on his own imagining of how Spanish captivity had provided a safe haven from the collapse of Germany's colony: 'Here under the Spanish flag,/Blows the wind of peace,/Fernando Poo, we Germans salute you faithfully!' ¹¹⁸

Notes

1. Archivo Histórico Nacional (AHN), M^o_EXTERIORES_H,3050, Exp.1, German attachment Abschrift zu. IIIb 24,792.
2. AHN, M^o_EXTERIORES_H,3102, Exp.2, "que los alemanes de Camerún internados en esta capital se han portado y se portan correctamente en sus relaciones sociales y que si bien [...] corrieron rumores de que uno de aquéllos había sido muerto a manos de una señorita ello no tuvo confirmación después de practicadas las debidas averiguaciones."
3. O'Neil, *Born Under the Gun*, foreword by Victor Ngoh, ix.
4. Stibbe, *Civilian Internment during the First World War*; and Panayi and Manz, *Enemies in the Empire*.
5. Bauerkämper, *Sicherheit und Humanität im Ersten und Zweiten Weltkrieg*, 576.
6. Kowner, Rachamimov (eds), Introduction in, *Out of Line, Out of Place*, 15.
7. Hedinger, Heé, "Transimperial History – Connectivity, Coperation and Competition", 430.
8. Pérez de Arcos, "'Finding Out Whereabouts of Missing Persons': The European War Office, Transnational Humanitarianism and Spanish Royal Diplomacy in the First World War," 1.
9. García Sanz, "British Blacklists in Spain During the First World War; González Calleja, *Nido de espías. España, Francia y la Primera Guerra Mundial*; Ponce Marrero, "La propaganda alemana en España durante la primera guerra mundial"; Cabrera, "The British Film Campaign in Spain During the First World War

- (1914–1918)”; and Grafl, “Propaganda and pistolero: Barcelona as an alternative battleground of the First World War”.
10. Fuentes Codera, “Germanófilos y neutralistas”; Juliá, “La nueva generación: de neutrales a antigermanófilos pasando por aliadófilos”; Fuentes Codera, *España en la Gran Guerra Mundial. Una movilización cultural*; and Fuentes Codera, “Neutralidad o intervención: Los intelectuales españoles frente a la Primera Guerra Mundial (1914–1918)”.
 11. Fuentes Codera, “El giro global y transnacional”; and Fuentes Codera, *Spain and Argentina in the First World War: Transnational Neutralities*.
 12. Pérez de Arcos, “Finding Out Whereabouts of Missing Persons.”
 13. Abbenhuis and Tames, *Global War, Global Catastrophe*, 6.
 14. Mathieu, “L’Union Fait La Force”.
 15. Steinbach, “Between Intimacy and Violence,” in Das, Maguire, Steinbach (eds), *Colonial Encounters*, 114.
 16. See Callahan, *Mandates and Empire*; Pedersen, *The Guardians*.
 17. Schulte-Varendorff, *Krieg im Kamerun*; Strachan, *To Arms*, Vol 1; and Murphy, *Colonial Captivity*.
 18. Moyd, “Centring a Sideshow,” 113.
 19. Njung, “Refugee Exchanges between Cameroon and Equatorial Guinea.”
 20. Laburthe-Tolra, “Vers la lumière?”; and Quinn, “The Impact of the First World War and its Aftermath on the Beti of Cameroun”, in Page (ed) *Africa and the First World War*.
 21. O’Neill, *Born under the Gun*, 136–137.
 22. de Vries, “Cameroonian Schutztruppe Soldiers in Spanish-Ruled Fernando Po.”
 23. *Ibid.*, 300.
 24. González Calleja, “El internamiento de los colonos alemanes del Camerún en la Guinea Española.”
 25. Gutiérrez Koester, “Viva Alemania”: German Internees of Cameroon in Spain during World War I”.
 26. Abbenhuis and Tames, *Global War, Global Catastrophe*, 7.
 27. The National Archives at Kew (TNA), SNO Duala to Admiralty, 17 April 1916, FO 383/213.
 28. TNA, Hardinge to Sir Edward Grey, 17 April 1916, FO 383/213.
 29. TNA, British Embassy in Madrid to Sir Edward Grey, 4 May 1916, FO 383/213.
 30. AHN, Minister of War to Minister of State, 4 May 1916, M^o_EXTERIORES_H,3050, Exp. 3. “Se ha procedido a exigir en Cádiz el día cuatro del actual la palabra de honor de aquellos, comprometiéndose a no ausentarse de las poblaciones en que se les ha distribuido.”
 31. AHN, Spanish Ambassador at Berlin Polo to Minister of State, 22 May 1916, M^o_EXTERIORES_H,3050, Exp. 3.
 32. AHN, Spanish Subsecretary of State to Minister of State, 6 June 1916, M^o_EXTERIORES_H,3050.
 33. The sole published version of this table includes several typos and alterations in type definitions. Furthermore, it was derived from an original document that also contained some errors. This updated version has been cross-checked with the original correspondence used to populate

the initial table. AHN, M°_EXTERIORES_H,3050, Exp. 6. However, it is important to note that some of the numbers underwent slight changes over time.

34. AHN, 17 May 1916, M°_EXTERIORES_H,3050, Exp. 6.
35. Aitken and Rosenhaft, *Black Germany*, 183.
36. Bundesarchiv (BA) R1001 4104, Atangana to Carl Ebermaier, 12 December 1919.
37. AHN, 19 May 1916, Luis Valdés, M°_EXTERIORES_H,3050, Exp. 6.
38. "Notas de sport," *Diario de Avisos de Zaragoza*, 24 April 1917.
39. Ciria Amores, *El sueño de ser grandes*, 99.
40. Footnote p. 227 <https://e-archivo.uc3m.es/rest/api/core/bitstreams/9c8f39d7-b726-43e8-a8ea-ce58527f1c52/content>.
41. AHN, German Ambassador Prince Ratibor to Minister of State Amalio Gimeno, 14 May 1916, M°_EXTERIORES_H,3050, Exp. 5. "Vu que souvent des questions y seront soulevées qui feron desirer un traitement verbal."
42. "Ebermayer carece de autoridad y facultades para desempeñar en nuestro territorio las funciones que pretende atribuirse." AHN, Romanones to Gimeno, 24 May 1916, M°_EXTERIORES_H,3050, Exp. 5.
43. AHN, Gimeno to Ratibor, 26 May 1916, M°_EXTERIORES_H,3050, Exp. 5. "El Gobierno de S. M. estima preferable que el Señor Ebermaier no se ausente de Madrid."
44. AHN, Ratibor to Gimeno, 6 July 1916, M°_EXTERIORES_H,3050, Exp. 5. "L'expression choisie par Votre Excellence me fait croire que la decision prise par le Gouvernement Royal à ce sujet ne sout pas irrevocable ni definitive mais je dois avouer que cette réponse sans donner des raisons m'a cause une vive surprise."
45. AHN, Minister of State to Minister of War, 19 July 1916, AHN, M°_EXTERIORES_H,3050, Exp. 5.
46. AHN, French Ambassador at Madrid to Gimeno, 25 October 1916, M°_EXTERIORES_H,3050, Exp. 5.
47. "Jeder Deutsche, der von seiner Arbeit abkommen konnte, war vertreten. Aber auch die spanische Bevölkerung hatte mit den Deutschen gewetteifert, uns eine angenehme Überraschung zu bereiten. Es gab zunächst Freibier. Man höre und staune. Freibier für 800 Menschen, die aus Afrika kommen und Nachkommen jener Völker sind, die zu beiden Ufern des Rheins saßen!" Skolaster, *Krieg im Busch*, 146.
48. "Daß die Spanier uns Deutsche gastfreundlich aufnahmen ist bekannt." DKZ, *Zur Kriegszeit als Schwester in Kamerun*.
49. Skolaster, *Krieg im Busch*, 147.
50. Ibid., 148.
51. Pérez de Arcos, "Finding Out Whereabouts of Missing Persons."
52. AGP, OGE 26,440/025, Ernst Neuse and Eberhard Neuse file.
53. AGP, OGE 26,545/034, Max Hermann Schmidt file.
54. *Kolonie und Heimat*, Kriegsnummer 28, 1916, 7.
55. *Kolonie Und Heimat*, Kriegsnummer 38, 1916, 7.
56. *Kolonie und Heimat*, Kriegsnummer 36, 1916, 7.
57. *Kolonie und Heimat* Kriegsnummer 37, 1916, 3.

58. Barrera, *Lo que son y lo que deben ser las posesiones españolas del Golfo de Guinea*.
59. *Gaceta de Madrid*, n. 194, 12 July 1904, 131–133.
60. "El trabajo inmenso que se ha hecho y hoy realmente resultan una preciosidad."
"toda la internación me ha quitado diez años de vida" AGP, Barrera to Loriga, 13 September 1916, 12,138.
61. TNA, "Answers to Questions," n.d., NA, ADM 116/1494.
62. "le quitaba el sueño", AGP Barrera to Loriga, 13 September 1916, 12,138.
63. TNA, Secretary of the War Office to the Under Secretary of State at the Foreign Office, 28 October 1916, FO 383/214, p .2. "the French Government may be approached with a view to unambiguous joint representations being made to the Spanish government as to the necessity for carrying out without further delay the arrangements, already the subject of prolonged negotiations, for the removal to Spain of all the German personnel, civil and military, still remaining in Fernando Po, and for the repatriation to the Cameroons of the native troops and non-combatants."
64. TNA, Senior Naval Officer West Coast of Africa to the Secretary of the Admiralty, 6 October 1916, FO 383/214.
65. AHN, Hardinge to Gimeno, 2 December 1916, M^o_EXTERIORES_H,3102, Exp.2, .
66. TNA, Valentine Phillimore to Barrera, 28 October 1916, ADM 116/1494.
67. TNA, Barrera to Valentine Phillimore, 28 October 1916, ADM 116/1494.
68. "Al enviar los indígenas al Continente en plena estación de aguas, es condenar a muchos a muerte cuando por estar terminados campamento empezaban a reponerse terrible crisis sufrida durante guerra y evacuación; and no es igual haberles traído desde el continente que llevarles desde aquí a aquél donde falta todo." "el desastre sería inmenso y nuestra responsabilidad moral grande."
69. "La manifestación sincera de mi ineptitud."
70. de Vries, "Cameroonian Schutztruppe Soldiers in Spanish-Ruled Fernando Po."
71. TNA, Senior Naval Officer West Coast of Africa Valentine Phillimore, Letter of Proceedings, 8 September 1916, p. 2, ADM 116/1494.
72. TNA, Secretary of the War Office to the Under Secretary of State at the Foreign Office, 28 October 1916, FO 383/214, 1.
73. TNA, Valentine Phillimore to the Secretary of the Admiralty, "Report of Proceedings from 8th Dec to 10th Jan," 10 January 1917, ADM 116/1494.
74. AHN, Vitus Atangana to French Governor at Duala, 17 March 1917, M^o_EXTERIORES_H,3102, Exp.3. "Devolver aquí a todos mis hermanos y hermanas. Pues estoy muy triste aquí y no puede vivir bien sin mis hermanos y hermanas."
75. AHN, Elumdene to the French Governor in Duala, 8 May 1917, M^o_EXTERIORES_H,3102, Exp.3. "Lloramos tener aquí en Jaundé nuestro Jefe Efa-Elle. Ninguna compañía puede ser sin Jefe y un bosque no se llamará bosque sin tener grandes los grandes árboles, así nos pasa a nosotros de vivir sin Jefe. No tendremos tranquilidad aquí si no tendremos devuelto nuestros Señores Jefes y nuestro país pronto, pronto se arruinará. Lamentamos a lágrima viva de nuestros señores, que están en Fernando Poo."

76. "Estos indígenas después de diez y seis meses de Guerra se encuentra aquí tranquilos; se dan cuenta que en esta Colonia no tienen dificultades, y que cumpliendo las Leyes, gozan de una Libertad perfecta; and han desbosado el terreno donde se les ha establecido, han construido sus casas, han hecho plantaciones, y se encuentran a su gusto, no deseando irse por el momento.
77. BA1001-3934 Abteilung für Requisitionen in Strafsachen Magda Bubeck geb. Rodatz, 24 March 1915, 18-20.
78. "Man kann sich denken wie Entsetzlich uns der Gedanke war, unsere Schöne Kolonie verlassen zu müssen, in der die Deutschen mit so viel Mühe und Fleiss ein Stück Kultur geschaffen haben, wie wir würden wir dieselbe wiederfinden -, eine Regenzeit überwuchert alles. Aber es half nichts, wir waren eben Gefangene und mussten uns fügen." BA1001-3934 Abteilung für Requisitionen in Strafsachen Magda Bubeck geb. Rodatz, 24 March 1915, 24.
79. *Kolonie Und Heimat*, Kriegsnummer 3, 1915, 10.
80. AHN, Ratibor to Gimeno, 12 September 1916, M°_EXTERIORES_H,2987, Exp.48.
81. AHN, Minister of War to State Minister, 12 September 1916, M°_EXTERIORES_H,2987, Exp.48; and From State Minister Gimeno to Ratibor, 13 September 1916, AHN, M°_EXTERIORES_H,2987,Exp.48.
82. AHN, A. Rittersdorf to Spanish War Minister, 11 December 1917, MAE_H. 3050, Exp. 2. "sean abonados los gastos de nuestra manutención. Considerando la carestía de los víveres lo creemos justo que se nos pague seis pesetas diarias y estas a contar desde el día en que fuimos internados."
83. AHN, Alfred Rittersdorf to Minister of State, 26 February 1918, MAE_H. 3050, Exp. 2.
84. AHN, Ratibor to Gimeno, 11 March 1917, M°_EXTERIORES_H,2987, Exp.29.
85. AHN, Compañía Transatlántica to Minister of State Gimeno, 6 July 1917, M°_EXTERIORES_H,2987, Exp.29.
86. AHN, Lema to Ratibor, 6 July 1917, M°_EXTERIORES_H,2987, Exp.29.
87. AHN, Ratibor to Minister of State Marquis of Alhucemas, 5 December 1917, M°_EXTERIORES_H,2987, Exp. 5.
88. AHN, Julio Nelken to Albrecht, 25 September 1917, M°_EXTERIORES_H,2987, Exp. 5.
89. AHN, Ratibor to Minister of State Eduardo Dato, 9 August 1919, M°_EXTERIORES_H,2987, Exp. 5; and AHN, Letter of support from Deputee for Tarazona to Minister of State, 9 August 1918, M°_EXTERIORES_H,2987, Exp. 5.
90. AHN, Subsecretary J. Pérez Caballero to Minister of War, 11 December 1919, M°_EXTERIORES_H,2987, Exp. 5.
91. AHN, Note verbale Ratibor to Ministry of State, 10 December 1918, M°_EXTERIORES_H,2987, Exp. 5.
92. AHN, Note verbale Ratibor to Ministry of State, 27 March 1919, M°_EXTERIORES_H,2987, Exp. 5.
93. AHN, Barrera to Minister of State, 10 July 1919, 1, M°_EXTERIORES_H,3051, Exp. 9.
94. Letter from Barrera to Minister of State, 14 July 1919, 2.
95. "Habiendo muchos cuyo país está a varios centenares de kilómetros de la costa les aterra volver á sufrir a la inversa de lo que hicieron al seguir

a los alemanes las penalidades presentes aun por las muchas mujeres y niños que murieron y temen mueran muchos más en este nuevo éxodo.”

96. AHN, Minister of State Lema to British Chargé d’Affairs Crackanthorpe, 25 August 1919, I, M^o_EXTERIORES_H,3051, Exp.9.
97. AHN, Letter from Barrera to Minister of State, 10 July 1919, M^o_EXTERIORES_H,3051, Exp.9, p. 1.
98. AHN, British Ambassador Hardinge to Minister of State Lema, 17 August 1919, M^o_EXTERIORES_H,3051, Exp. 9.
99. AHN, French Ambassador Gabriel Alapetite to Minister of State Lema, 14 August 1919, M^o_EXTERIORES_H,3051, Exp. 9.
100. AHN, German Ambassador to Lema, 26 July 1919, M^o_EXTERIORES_H,3051, Exp. 9. The change in Germany’s regime and the arrival of a new ambassador to Spain could clarify why the German ambassador refers to Atangana as if he did not know much about him.
101. AHN, Lema to German Ambassador to Madrid, 31 July 1919, M^o_EXTERIORES_H,3051, Exp. 9.
102. AHN, Lema to Barrera and aux bons soins autorités Duala, 31 July 1919, M^o_EXTERIORES_H,3051, Exp. 9.
103. TNA, Report of the Officer of the Vauban Containing Information collected at Fernando Po, 19 June 1916, FO383/213 117,499.
104. *Nuevo Mundo* (Madrid), 10 October 1919, 18–19 <https://hemerotecadigital.bne.es/hd/viewer?oid=0001766473&page=19>.
105. Quinn. “Charles Atangana of Yaounde.” Quinn’s biographical profile differs somewhat from the profile presented in the newspaper.
106. *Nuevo Mundo* (Madrid), 10 October 1919, 18–19.
107. AGP, Carlos Atangana to Emilio M^a de Torres, n.d. 12230/06.
108. Laburthe-Tolra, *Vers la lumière?*, 275.
109. BA 1001–3979 Funkspruch aus Madrid, 12 September 1919.
110. BA 1001–3979 Betrifft: Stand der Heimreise der Internieren, 24 October 1919, 188.
111. BA 1001–3979 Betrifft: Heimreise der in Spanien festgehaltenen Kameruner auf dem Dampfer Atlante 29 November 1919, 216.
112. BA 1001–3979 Telegram, 25 November 1919, 194.
113. Glock, *Es war Einmal*, 5.
114. On Brother Afons see Orosz, “The Dwarf, the Goetzen and C.S. Forester’s *African Queen*.”
115. Zantop, *Colonial Fantasies*.
116. Ramón J. Sender, *La Quinta Julieta* (1st ed. 1957; 2001).
117. Sergio del Molino, *En 15*, 8 May 2024: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=09kaG2BTGcg&t=548s>. 8.58 m.
118. “Hier unter Spanischer Flagge, Da weht des Friedens Wind, Fernando Poo, dich grüßen, Wir Deutsche treu gesinnt!” Glock, *Es war Einmal*, 49.

Acknowledgements

The authors would like to thank the Kyoto University Institute for the Future of Human Society, supportive colleagues at the Department of International History at the London School of Economics, the Michael E. DeBakey Fellowship at the U.S. National Library of Medicine, and the Madrid Royal Palace Archive staff. We also wish to express our gratitude to the anonymous reviewers and the journal editors for their insightful comments and constructive criticism.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

Funding

The work was supported by the European Commission [MSCA.COFUND2019. GLOBAL_AT_VENICE.PEREZDEARCOS]; U.S. National Library of Medicine [Michael E. DeBakey Fellowship].

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